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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes the development of a new approach to survey research in black urban communities, in part by adapting standard techniques. Attention is directed at a group of salient assumptions underlying social science investigations, namely: (1) the universality of majority culture models of attitude structure; (2) sociolinguistic and linguistic styles in black communities; (3) the utility of majority culture cognitive frameworks to understanding black attitudes toward sensitive topics; and, (3) the adequacy of traditional survey research procedures to garner valid samples in urban black communities. Research pursued during summer 1975 involved eliciting a domain of thoughts about television in open-ended interviews with a cross-section of black respondents, refining that to a number of categories, and construction of an attitude scale reflecting those categories. Experienced black interviewers approached black residents of San Jose, East Palo Alto, San Francisco, and Oakland, California, in a variety of settings to ensure a mix of relevant and "irrelevant" factors. The interviewers attempted to structure the intercept as a conversation, so that the black respondents would feel free to utilize a similar communication style. The emphasis was on generating as much information about the cognitive categories people utilize to think about television as possible. (Author/JM)

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"CROSS CULTURAL METHODS FOR SURVEY RESEARCH IN BLACK URBAN AREAS"[1]

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This paper summarizes the development of a new approach to survey research in Black urban communities. While the results of an ongoing investigation of attitudes toward television are not yet available, the main features of the research design will be discussed, as will proposals designed to minimize sources of error.

Kenneth Clark (1965) is credited with first focusing attention on problems associated with survey research conducted on Black respondents. So little attention is typically paid to pre-testing questions for use with Black populations that the results of such surveys are scientifically useless and probably misleading. Questions are seldom derived from cognitive categories utilized by and meaningful to respondents, but instead represent university and research center concepts. Further, as Cedric X (Clark) points out, the very act of conceptualizing a problem to be investigated introduces a systematic error to the questions being asked when the researchers are not themselves immersed in the cultures under investigation (Clark, 1972).

A recent poll conducted by a Black consumer research firm revealed nearly 80% of those sampled expressed doubt about the results of national polls of Black opinions (NBMC Summary, 1975). Such doubts express the layman's exasperation with purportedly scientific summaries of Black opinions. It is the contention of this author that the majority of surveys conducted in minority communities in this country are unscientific at best, and for reasons which we will examine, majority culture scientists have chosen to ignore techniques which would insure greater validity.

Since survey research is such a popular tool in the behavioral scientist's repertoire, this paper will address the development of a set of procedures for adapting standard techniques to investigations where Black populations are respondents. Implications will be discussed for a wide variety of research efforts.

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Separate Realities and Uniform Assumptions

We will not here concern ourselves with the criticisms leveled at any social science investigation with limited resources or manpower. Instead, attention will be directed at a group of salient assumptions, namely: (1) the universality of majority culture models of attitude structure; (2) sociolinguistic and linguistic styles in Black communities; (3) the utility of majority culture cognitive frameworks to understanding Black attitudes toward sensitive topics; and (4) the adequacy of traditional survey research procedures to garner valid samples in urban Black communities.

The origins of attitude measurement technology originated with the desire to quantify on a physical continuum the affect or feeling associated with some psychological object (Thurstone, 1946). Using a sample plan that allows generalizability to a larger population, interviewers ask respondent's for their opinions at the respondent's residence.

Such a model carries with it several assumptions about attitude structure. First, it is assumed that attitudes, like pencils, are already available to respondents; all that need be done is to turn them over to the interviewer. Second, attitudes are individual constructs, formed by the individual as no other person may articulate for him. Third, there is an implicit model of consciousness, consisting of feelings that may be described in linear form, feelings that may be separated from a network of modifiers, associations, transitory impulses, salient values without doing violence to those feelings.

In a review of Western assumptions in the techniques of attitude measurement, Drake (1973) offers scathing criticisms of these assumptions. With so little consensus among cognitive psychologists, cognitive anthropologists and brain researchers about the structure of conscious thought, it is useful, perhaps, to utilize physical metaphors to describe unknown entities such as feelings, but caution is advised.

Different cultures conceptualize reality in different ways, such that translating terms meaningful to one culture to another must sometimes involve interpretation as well as finding words for things (Young, 1972). For instance, there are several words for snow in some Eskimo languages, reflecting those cultures' attention to variations, but only one word in English. Some cultures do not conceptualize time as a linear variable moving into the future, but " a composition of events which have occurred those which are taking place now and those which are immediately to occur. What has not taken place or what has no likelihood of an immediate occurance falls into the category of 'No-time'. What is certain to occur, or what falls within the rhythm of natural phenomena, is in the category of inevitable or potential time" (Mbiti, 1970, p.21).

Since concept is a more generic term than attitude, concepts order the association of any two entities or events. Whether or not there is any evaluative component attached to the concept, where cultures differ radically on concepts (such as the nature of time) attitude statements derived in one culture may be meaningless to individuals

in the other. What value are scales devised to measure a "psychological object" such as personal achievement in cultures emphasizing cooperative effort, community consensus and public ownership of land?

In a country where self-reliance is emphasized, where individual achievement is idealized, it is easy to see how attitude researchers assume individuals form an opinion for themselves, that no one can speak for another. What happens in cultures where it is unknown to have individual opinions, where a village headman is spokesman for the village, where individuals do not feel they need to form opinions about policy or national politics because that is an appointed leader's function? What is an individual opinion in cultures without concepts of private ownership or that do not stress individual achievement? Surely such a model is not useful across all cultures.

Procedures have been devised to insure the scalability, that is, unidimensionality of attitude statements, however seldom researchers avail themselves of such techniques. Clearly in situations where concepts related to variables of interest are likely to vary, as in cross cultural attitude measurement, the researcher must not only exercise exceptional care in insuring the scalability, reliability and unidimensionality of attitude items, but also conduct sufficient ethnographic research to understand the cognituve frameworks meaningful to respondents before any scales are constructed (Frey, 1970, Brislin, Lonner, & Thorndike, 1973).

Such a criteria is seldom met in cross cultural attitude surveys, perhaps because of salient ethnocentristic assumptions on the part of Western scientists. Certainly, attitude research conducted on Black Americans by majority culture practitioners reveals a myopic denial of the cultural distinctiveness of Black Americans, despite rapidly mounting evidence that there are major differences between Blacks and other Americans, and that these differences are not "deficits" but cultural transmissions and adaptations.

Black Language, Black Sociolinguistics

Anthropologists and linguists, perhaps because of their training, have of late begun investigations of the language spoken by Black Americans, their speaking styles and the contextual variables affecting speech production. Cross cultural ethnographic invistigations have long established the tremendous variability, not only in the languages spoken but in the ways cultures influence speakers' willingness to verbalize.

Ignorance of Black sociolinguistic styles has led some white researchers (e.g. Dale, 1972 p.249) to conclude Black children have no speech at all when Black children decline to speak to white researchers in unfamiliar situations. Such myopic errors are, in part, the result of a deficit ideological approach (Baratz & Baratz, 1970) and also the result of simplistic research designs that allow for only one comparison, typically Blacks versus whites on a variable of interest. Campbell (1961) urges researchers to avoid such designs, particularly in cross cultural research, because so many extraneous variables are additionally present that results are uninterpretable.

Studies by Labov (1969), Stewart (1957, 1967, 1968) and Dillard(1967) have demonstrated the survival of the pigdin language the African captives learned, to get along on slave plantations. An amalgam of standard English and African grammatical rules has survived, such that Dillard (1972) estimates eighty percent of American Blacks speak some mix of Black English, though all understand standard English.

The implications of language differences between white interviewers and Black respondents are particularly acute when it is observed that Black Americans, for the most part, accept the deficit assumption white Americans hold for their 'deviant" speech. Many are ashamed of their "bad English". Studies of interviewer errors note a great many interviewers fail to probe following a partial response (i.e. Willcock, 1956). White interviewers probably unintentionally influence Black responses by subtly "correcting" Black English, by re-phrasing it, a process sure to curtail responses, particularly in open-ended interviews.

Ethnographic studies of the sociolinguistics of Black speech have observed Black styles of speaking as distinctive as Navaho or Apache or Mexican-Americans. All three groups have been classified as sullen or uncommunicative by white researchers ignorant of the cultural influences affecting speech production. Philips (1972) investigated the conditions for speech usage among children of the Warm Springs Indian reservation in Oregon. In contrast to the speech situations encountered in the white reservation school, children are exposed to speech situations that emphasize leaderless discussions where everyone participates in the discussion. The children's silence in school cannot be understood without reference to the sociolinguistic patterns in evidence in their home and community, patterns which are never followed in the school.

Naturalistic observation, (i.e. ethnographic investigations of Black speech behavior are beginning to sketch out patterns of speech usage in Black homes and communities. In contrast to the rigid question and answer routine that is standard procedure for opinion pollsters, Abrahams & Gay (1972) speculate that "the Black model of discussion is not our first-you-speak-and-I'll-be-quiet, then-I'll-speak-and-you-be-quiet sort. Rather, the voice is used as an expression of the self and if one wants to be listened to he will not hesitate (at least among one's peers) to speak on top of other voices and to repeat the same sentiments either until he is responded to by someone in the group or until someone else catches his attention. Corollary to this, when someone speaks he expects the overlap of other voices because that generally means that the others are listening and reacting to what he is saying" (Abrahams & Gay, 1972) Amen. I hear you. Un-huh. Yes Sir. Right on.

The Black call-and-response communication pattern survives in Black urban communities. What happens when white interviewers, or Black ones for that matter, try to impose the former model on a different communication style? Are the "don't knows", silences, and failures to probe partly a function of the Black respondents' desires to disengage himself from unfamiliar speaking styles?

Another potential source of error lies with the inability of standard English speakers to understand the subtleties and nuances of para-

language cues, intonation, pauses, and nonverbal gestural clues (e.g. hands on hips, rolling of eyes) which accompany messages. Such interviewers may repeat questions, ask "what", or score some responses as "no opinions" or "don't know", or fail to probe where opinions are ambivalent because they are not able to understand the respondent.

Cognitive Frameworks - The Problem of Meaning

The most comprehensive investigation of response effects in interviews concludes "response effects occur when the respondent has not arrived at a firm position on the issue and when the subject of the study is highly related to the respondent or interviewer's racial characteristics" (Sudman & Bradburn, 1974 p.137).

So far we have examined possible errors in conceptualizing attitude structure across cultures, and in the errors associated with interviewers' unfamiliarity with Black language and speaking styles. It would seem easy enough to replace Black interviewers for whites in Black communities. However, the large response effects associated with interviewer-respondent race differences (e.g. Schuman & Hatchett, 1974) are not solely a function of race but also the failure to conduct ethnographic investigations of the cognitive categories Blacks utilize to construct attitudes.

When researchers construct attitude statements, they are also utilizing concepts which may have little meaning outside their narrow consensus of academic researchers. Anthropologists have criticized attempting to measure things in other cultures without an understanding of the culturally defined system of concepts, categories, classifications and contextual variables which are meaningful to the native speaker:

> Even with reference to quite obvious kinds of material objects, it has long been noted that many people do not 'see things' quite the way we do. (A Study) purporting to illustrate the primitive's deficient abstractive ability, concerns a Brazilian Indian tribe which allegedly has no word for 'parrot' but only words for 'kinds of parrots' (Jespersen, 1934). The people of such a tribe undoubtedly classify the birds of their environment in some fashion; certainly they do not bestow a unique personal name on each individual bird specimen they encounter. Classification means that individual bird specimens must be matched against the defining attributes of conceptual categories and thereby judged to be equivalent for certain purposes to some other specimens but different from still others. Since no two birds are alike in every discernable feature, any grouping into sets implies a selection of only a limited number of features as significant for contrasting kinds of birds. A person learns which features are significant from his fellows as part of his cultural equipment. He does not receive this information from the

> birds. Knowing how the Indian himself groups these objectives and which attributes he selects as dimensions (will) generate a taxonomy of avifauna. With the latter knowledge we learn what these people regard as significant about birds. (Frake, 1962)

Even within Anglo-American culture, the use of research designs capable of uncovering the respondents' own understanding of the concepts under scrutiny has been urged.

> An underlying cause of many methodological problems may be that sociologists often assume that they know a great deal about what people think before they have collected any data. They implicitly assume that cognitive content does not vary greatly across subcultures or social positions, therefore little effort is devoted to discovering the meaning of the questions and responses to the people who are being studied. And no effort is directed to the more difficult task of examining how the subjects structure the relevant cognitive domain. i.e., what categories they use and what components or critical attributes determine categorization. For example, a typical sociological study of the political attitudes of students would not investigate what kinds of opinions were treated as 'political' by students, or what components of an opinion were relevant in categorizing it as 'left' or 'right'. Yet this type of information probably would be very useful for understanding radical student political activity. The substitution of preconceptions for evidence about meanings and categories will obviously result in inaccurate descriptions of what people think. (Cancian, 1973)

Considering the paucity of research on Black cognitive functioning, it is easy to see how researchers have obtained questionable data from responses to questions like "how would you punish misbehavior?" Blacks may regard misbehavior as not coming to dinner at all, while whites may interpret the question as ten minutes late for dinner. Responses of "a slap in the face," and "a scolding" may then be wholly misinterpreted because researchers neglected to uncover the meanings of the questions to respondents.

Finally, Cannell, Lawson, and Hausser (1975) report tape recordings of interviewers at work showed interviewers frequently misclassify the responses given them, and 36% of the questions were not asked as written, 20% altered enough to destroy comparability. Slippage between the researchers' constructs and respondents' categories may easily manifest themselves in higher rates of interviewer misclassification.

Thus, a major source of error in survey research with Black American populations probably lies in the construction of categories from

which questions are derived. The slippage between respondents' categories and the researcher's concepts then interact with the kinds of errors many interviewers are prone to make.

Refusal Rates

Even when Black interviewers are used, and ethnographic procedures are employed to develop categories meaningful to respondents, there remains the problem of obtaining unbiased estimates of population parameters when large proportions of Black residents refuse to be interviewed. Greenberg and Dervin (1970) for instance, report 33% of those contacted refused to participate. Jackson (1975) reports studies conducted by Michigan's Institute for Social Research obtained refusal rates of 40% in Black communities. We know of no investigations that describe the reasons why so many Blacks refuse to be polled, but speculate that Black sociolinguistic styles, fear of welfare and police investigators masquerading as interviewers, and alienation from dominant institutions are behind the extraordinarily high rates. Commercial pollsters, in contrast, typically report that 20-22% if the population cannot be reached after 3, call backs, or refuse to be polled.

Since significant proportions of the Black population are not polled, systematic biases are built into summaries of Black opinions. People who refuse to be sampled are probably more alienated from dominant institutions, and thereby more critical of society in general.

Cross Cultural Methods for Black Survey Research

The investigation of Black attitudes toward television offerings continues at this writing. Work has been completed field testing a set of procedures for increasing rapport with Black respondents, and eliciting rich, meaningful data from respondents in Black communities, to construct categories meaningful to Black respondents for the construction of open and closed-ended questions.

Two recent studies have approached the task in ways that guide our thinking. In an attempt to understand a social subculture in the United States, Spradley (1972) utilized an ethnographic approach to the study of urban nomads, i.e., hobos. Starting with participant observation, Spradley identified elements of the culture that he felt were operationally significant within the domain of "places to sleep," for example. Then, structured statements about these elements of the culture were created, and presented to subjects. The answers to the questions were analyzed according to procedures described by Black and Metzger (1965) to define domains, question frames, and "substitution frames." Without imposing his own categories on the population of nomads, Spradley was able to generate domains of attitudes and life functions relevant and meaningful to his subjects. Coincidentally, he found the cultural definitions of the general population were at considerable variance with the categories utilized by such nomads to describe or structure their value orientations.

In the area of attitude measurement, Knapper, Cropley, and Moore (1973) utilized a procedure similar to ethnoscientific methods to study Canadian attitudes towards the use of seat belts. A series of interviews was first conducted with "experts" such as police, civic safety council, state transportation companies, etc. Interviews were taken with members of the general public. A variety of techniques were employed to get at underlying feelings and attitudes. After these, a series of open-ended, non-directed interviews was conducted with another sample drawn at random from the Canadian population. From the analysis of responses, categories relevant to the population under study were identified, and a questionnaire constructed. The actual wording of responses elicited from open-ended interviews was used in questionnaire items. Again, the questions can be said to have come from the cognitive domains of respondents, rather than being imposed on the population from the investigators' viewpoints alone.

Design

The Summer, 1975 research effort is a task of eliciting a domain of thoughts about television, in open-ended interviews with a cross-section of Black respondents, refining that to a number of categories, and construction of an attitude scale reflecting those categories. Comparisons of interview richness will go on concurrently.

Random Probe in Public and Private Settings

Experienced Black interviewers are approaching Black residents of San Jose, East Palo Alto, San Francisco, and Oakland, California, in a variety of settings to ensure a mix of relevant and "irrelevant" factors. Settings include private homes, churches, barber shops, laundromats, stores, and on the street waiting for buses. No attempt is made to ensure a statistically valid quota sample. Instead, interviewers collect data at a variety of times. from morning to early evening, from appropriate numbers of males and females in each age group. For example, the latest census figures report that 16% of the Black female population is between the ages of 17 and 21. Of a sample of 100 respondents, 16 will be Black females between 17 and 21.

Our interviewers are attempting to structure the intercept as a conversation, such that Black respondents feel free to utilize a familiar communication style. Responses are tape recorded, using a small portable machine so that respondents need not stop talking while interviewers write. Reviewers are encouraged to respond with "un-huh", "um-hum", "all right", "I hear you" where appropriate such that the intercepts take on the style of a flowing exchange rather than I-speak-then-you-speak. Interviewers of course refrain from expressing opinions; they are to reinforce respondents unconditionally.

Emphasis is on generating as much information about the cognitive categories people utilize to think about television. For instance, the most frequently mentioned attribute used to order evaluative statements about television, is the concept "realness". Good-bad

dimensions are almost always related to the degree to which respondents see dramatic or comedy shows approach their concepts of reality.

A recent study of attitudes toward the media in Boston found "reality" was a salient evaluative dimension (Jones,1975). Such a finding substantially replicating our results, lends credence to the question development phase procedures.

Based on preliminary open-ended responses to the question, "What do you think about television?" and common sense categories, this initial 100 respondents are being asked broad open-ended questions, such as, "What is your favorite show? ... What do you like about it?"

At the same time, our interviewers are generating useful data on factors that enhance or delimit rapport in the survey situation. Interviewers have noted:

- Sometimes "don't know" responses are a way of saying, "Give me a minute to think about it." Interviewers have re-phrased questions and politely asked again with surprisingly good results.

- While "Um-hum" seems to reinforce respondents, and encourages them to continue, "OK" seems to imply. "That's enough, stop! "

- Sunglasses are very inhibiting to respondents.

- Interviews proceed much better when interviewers concentrate on the respondent and less the task, or the answers. Respondents are quite sensitive to whether or not interviewers appear concerned with them as individuals.

- Respondents open up better when interviewers don't immediately rush into the questions but begin a conversation after announcing their request for an interview, then proceed with the questions.

- Timing is crucial in interviews. Respondents sense a lack of concern when interviewers seem to be rushing through the questions.

These are our initial impressions, and are of course, limited to the specific question development task of eliciting categories, and perhaps also to the settings in which we approach people. We are noting carefully all the factors which affect rapport so that by the end of the Summer's research, we'll have a manual of procedures to train interviewers.

The random intercept method elicits responses to different wordings such that comparisons of open vs. closed question wordings may be compared, aided vs. unaided recall, etc.

Refusal rates have been almost nonexistent in the random intercept method. Interviewers are instructed to approach every n^{th} person

at a particular locale, just as a sampling plan orders which residences are to be approached, and 3-5% refusal rates have been obtained. A recent study of theatre patrons' attitudes toward Black movies obtained similar results (Lovelace and Fairchild, 1975). However, as our interviewers got closer to individuals' homes, (e.g. their front yards, washing their cars, porches) refusal rates went up dramatically. Respondents began finding plausible excuses why they could not be polled "right now". Further ethnographic research is needed along the lines suggested by Bauman (1972) for sociolinguistic research to explicate the reluctance Black respondents exhibit when approached at or around their residence.

Implications for Surveys and Other Research

The procedures described to create categories meaningful to respondents are not new, but well known to cross cultural researchers. The utility of this decentering process is enormous in countries with heterogenous populations whose concepts of reality may vary along unknown dimensions. Certainly the experiences of the 26 million men and women of color in the U.S. are sufficient to expect major differences. In a related paper (Word, 1975) this author advanced the thesis that a large body of African habits of thought and speech have in fact survived slavery and second class citizenship, and may be operating at unconscious levels of awareness.

The implications for researchers in such areas as personality measurement are clear. Just as cross cultural investigations utilizing U.S. standardized instruments have had to not only translate, but interpret test items to make sure they tap the same things in other countries, (e.g., Brislin, Lonner, and Thorndike, 1973) anytime questions designed to measure psychological dispositions are created with one population in mind, their utility for other populations must be demonstrated before results can be accepted. The question and answer sequence typically employed by dominant institutions, social service agencies, schools, counseling centers must be seen as an alien sociolinguistic mode for the large majority of Black respondents. Results of such interviews must be tempered with an understanding of the contributions of the mode to opinions expressed, especially as respondents decline to verbalize or elaborate.

Finally, further research is needed, especially on sociolinguistic patterns in every day communication, in contacts between pastoral counselors and persons seeking help, and on the cognitive styles utilized by Black Americans to describe themselves, their surroundings, and the universe of ideas meaningful to them.

* * *

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[2] Requests for reprints should be sent to CARL O. WORD, Cablecommunications Resource Center/West, 800 Welch Road, Palo Alto, California, 94304.

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